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DATE: Dec. 4, 1969

SUBJECT: Prime Minister's Remarks on ABM and North American Defense

REF:

Prime Minister TRUDEAU told the House of Commons, during the question period of December 2, that the GOC would not comment on its continental defense policy until its white paper on defense is published sometime during the current session of Parliament. He also said that he was sure that the GOC's policy would be one of the factors taken into consideration by the U.S. before proceeding with the "finalization" of an ABM system. The full text of the Commons exchange follows.

Douglas (NDP leader): I should like to direct a question to the right hon. Prime Minister arising out of statement he made on March 19, as recorded on page 6833 of Hansard. At that time he said:

If, Mr. Speaker, after receiving all the information, we are led to the view that the ABM system constitutes escalation and is conducive to greater peril for mankind, then we shall condemn it. We shall tell the United States that we disapprove. If, on the other hand, we are convinced that the ABM system is necessary though regrettable as a move by the United States, then we shall have to decide whether or not we shall participate in the operation of that system.

What decision has been reached by the Prime Minister and his colleagues with respect to the ABM system, and has that decision been transmitted to the government of the United States?

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Prime Minister Trudeau: Well, Mr. Speaker, this question was only one of the various questions which had to be examined and decided upon by the government in the context of our review of defence policy as regards continental defence. I believe we indicated in the Speech from the Throne that there would be a white paper published on these matters during the current session. Until then we are not prepared to comment.

Douglas: A supplementary question. Have any discussions been held by any representatives or officials of the Canadian government with the government of the United States regarding the construction of an ABM system and particularly with reference to the implications it might have for Canada, especially the two bases which are to be located close to Canada, one in Montana and the other in North Dakota?

Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, at the time this matter was in the public eye we did have discussions. When I went to Washington I had some discussions with President Nixon and his ministers and officials, and our officials and ministers have had subsequent discussions. I cannot say whether there have been any recent discussions.

Broadbent (NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the Prime Minister's answer concerning the government's intention to publish a white paper on this subject, but has the government of Canada already informed the government of the United States of its views on whether or not the ABM decision by the Americans constitutes an escalation of the arms race?

Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat my first answer. Our views will be contained in a white paper; it will be an attempt to express to the country and to other countries an over-all view of our approach to continental defence.

Winch (NDP): A further supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. In view of the Prime Minister's statement that a white paper is going to be introduced, may I ask him whether or not this important matter will be discussed with the Standing Committee on External Affairs and National Defence prior to the publication of the white paper, particularly since under the committee's terms of reference it now has before it the subject of U.S.-Canada relations?

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Trudeau: Thank you very much. But it would not be our intention to refer this matter piecemeal to the committee. It would be our intention to refer it by way of a white paper, if they want to look at it in that form.

Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a supplementary question to the Prime Minister: In view of his earlier statement in the House that it was the intention of the government to study this ABM question and if the government decided that the decision of the United States was unfortunate or bad the government of Canada would then express its views to the United States, does the Prime Minister now expect that the government of Canada will reach a decision in this respect in time for its views to have any effect or any influence on the course to be followed by the United States?

Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, the first part of the question is clearly hypothetical. With regard to the second part, the timing, I understand that the United States is not actually proceeding with the construction until some time in the seventies. Therefore I am sure that this government's policy, the policies evolved in other countries, and perhaps as well the results of the strategic arms limitation talks being held at Helsinki, will all be factors that the government of the United States will want to take into consideration before proceeding with the finalization of an ABM system.

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